

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Brigadier General David G. Perkins, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq
Major General Mohammed al-Askari, Spokesman, Iraqi Ministry of Defense

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REPORTERS:

Gina Chon from the Wall Street Journal
Miguel Marquez from ABC News
Ahmed Jassem from Al-Arabiya

REPORTERS 1-18

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. I want to thank you for your attendance today on behalf of my friend, the General here, in this conference that we're going to focus on the operations in the provinces and especially...in particular, Diyala Province. If 2007 was the year of rule of law and so the year of 2008 is the year of rule of law and the government receiving all security responsibility. All this year we have witnessed a lot of operations in the areas that used to be hot areas and that was under the control of the terrorist groups, and how things now has turned around and things are better...security better. As you know, Basha'er al-Khair Operation started on the 29th of July and continued in the first and the second phase until August 11th where the DPM...the PM, the chief in command ordered that we need to stop the operations and close the operations and review what...and give the chance to the terrorist elements up there and start...and for...so they can surrender themselves and give them amnesty and through the amnesty period. And Operation Basha'er al-Khair had so many features of...most importantly that this operation started as a complete piece with all sectors, all forces. We didn't have any lack of...any shortages or any lacks in that operation. We had op-...forces mov-...we didn't give the chance to other elements...terrorist elements to leave the area...the scene and the ground in Diyala and leave to other provinces. We had operations in Basra, Maysan, Baghdad, and all the operations,

IAF[?] operations. We are going to display some of the outcome of the work that we have done, how other forces in other provinces worked in the same time that we were doing Operation Basha'er al-Khair in Diyala. This operation...in the first phases of this operation started...was able to achieve about 50% of the goals that we put down or set for this operation. That's why Basha'er al-Khair Operation presents the...it was a sign of good coordination, high coordination, level of coordination in the partnership. This is the first time we have reached to this level of coordination between the Iraqi people, Iraqi security forces and the coalition forces. Indeed, it was a...one teamwork and it was a great and excellent results. The work of other operation commands in other areas was all planned for and it was studied in a practical way. That's why we didn't give any chance to any terrorist elements to move from area to another and to reorganize themselves and to start establishing safe havens or bases in other areas outside Diyala. That's why when we start talking about Basha'er al-Khair Diyala Operation, we will talk about all the goals that we achieved through the work. First, before I start talking about Diyala Operation, I want to talk to you about other operations in Ninawa Province. Through this week we killed 4 terrorists. We arrested 31 wanted terrorists. We discovered 6 munitions. We freed about 6 kidnapped and defused a few car bombs. In Babil area, north of Hilla, we arrested 130 terrorists or

suspected terrorists and we confiscated weapons and munitions. In...we also did in Maysan area, we discovered munitions. As far as Diyala Basha'er al-Khair, we...the total of...before August 11th, before the stopping or the closing of the operations, the time from 29th of July 'til August 11th, we have the...we arrested 663 suspected or wanted targets. This number or this figure, maybe people will see it or view it as a big number. But these weren't...aren't random arrests, but it was all under arrest warrants and by...and we were all...they were all...they were all these targeted...targets were documented before it was implemented. And we found about four...we have four people...investigators from Baghdad supervising all the investigations. And those are wanted targets...wanted terrorist targets and they're all emirs. And they're all, like, ministers, like in Iraq...Iraqi...Islamic Iraqi State that they're talking about establishing in Diyala. They were all terrorist targets and there were about 42 now under the custody of Iraqi forces. And coalition forces also have some of those important targets. We killed 9 terrorists also. We rescued about 7 hostages. The people who benefited from the amnesty period that was...there was a committee that was formed in Diyala command...operation command and there were 11 that actually surrendered themselves. The displaced families that returned...returned displaced families, there were about 100...11...1,200 families and that's a signal or a

sign of the success of this operation. And the...many of those families returned back to Diyala. And the procedures that was taken by the command there that...to actually secure their areas and their neighborhoods by the police and the Iraqi Army. Also facilitated transportation. The PM, the prime minister, the chief in command, he sent about...he sent about 1 1/2 million...billion Iraqi dinar to give 1 million to each Iraqi family...displaced Iraqi family that returned back to Diyala Province. Also, there are committees formed to assess the damage that was caused by the terrorist groups to the houses and homes and villages of those people. And there are...the DPM is supervising those committees. Also, the invitation to the people...with all the people and all the tribes and the families that left their areas and went to other areas that we are completely ready to provide security to them and they can return back to their fam-...to their homes. We also were able to conf-...seize about...over 40 weapons caches and munitions and high explosives and all that. And because they were so big, we weren't able to explode those weapon caches and all that because we want to secure them first. We are able to defuse about 148 IED and they were outside the city center in Baquba and neighborhoods. We noticed that there was activities...a lot of activities of planting IEDs. And we have to say...we have to mention that the...a captain in the Iraqi Army, Adnan[ph] Hamad[ph], he's...who was promoted to a major now

because of heroic actions. He saw that there was over than 150 IEDs on the road. He was able to defuse all those IEDs by using very primitive ways, by using the scissors. And he had a working team of 10 soldiers. In standard time, actually, he was able to clean or clear this road from those IEDs. I mean...as you know that this work needs a lot of effort and needs a lot of work and time. But this simple man, when he started this...the work on defusing those IEDs, he had a full understanding of how to defuse or how to plant those IEDs so he was able to defuse all those IEDs. And he was promoted by the minister of defense to a major right now. And he...it's well deserved. Also, we were able to confiscate 1...300 AK-47s. Also, 34 mortars, 182 rockets, mortar rounds of...about 580 mortar rounds, 26 house-borne or bomb—those are where a house that was put together in order to explode them on the Iraqi forces or security forces and we discovered them. Also, we found one farm, a poultry farm, that was also put as an ambush and it was all full of IEDs and we were able to defuse all the IEDs. This is the total over all of the operations that happened so far in Basha'er al-Khair. And as you know, so far...and as you know that the third phase of this operation has stopped right now with...as...because of the director of the prime minister until the 15th...from the...starting from August 11th to the 15th of August. And this is over all and now...of the operations. And I'm going to give you...to defer to my colleague

here, General Perkins, to talk about the operations from the coalition forces.

BG PERKINS: Thank you, General. Good afternoon and As-Salāmu `Alaykum. As General Mohammed discussed, security operations in Diyala are going well. They are contributing to the stable trends to the low level of violence around Iraq. Coalition forces are holding to the prime minister's directed amnesty period for operations in the province as previously discussed. The amnesty is a sign of the progress and security that individuals want to embrace the rule of law. Indeed, the success in Diyala has been heavily driven by the local populace rejecting the violence of al-Qaida in Iraq's ideology, supporting the enforcement of law, and the mutual collaboration between the people in Diyala Province and the Iraqi security forces. However, the government is also collaborating with the people. A few days ago, I joined a delegation of representatives and met the general up there in Diyala and we were accompanied by the new deputy prime minister, Rafael[ph] Al-Sawi[ph]. We visited the people of Diyala and the local authorities to discuss the security situation, reconstruction, and reconciliation. During the visit, the delegation assembled the immediate- and long-term needs of the people and began discussions on how the government can best use the \$100 million allocated to meet the needs of the people. As

security continues to improve in the province, there will be projects to provide jobs, better medical services, and improved electricity services along with agricultural loans and grants and help for displaced families returning to their homes. So as people in Diyala assist security forces in rooting out terrorists and criminals in their neighborhoods, the government is helping the people by allocating funds to restore services and creating opportunities for the people to improve their lives. Over the past 18 months, we have seen time and again in Iraq that security is sustainable with support and service from the people. Part of the success of the partnership between Iraqi and coalition forces has been our ability to live close to the people and provide them with immediate and urgent help; proximity to the need and immediacy in the support sustained reconciliation. Now, as the government improves the ability to drive Iraq's long-term development and builds the institutional capacity to improve its investment in the country, there is more and more hope for the future for the new Iraq. Just as security improvements have taken time and sacrifice, so will the improvements in services and economic development. But the challenges are evolving. And while 12 months ago Iraqis were being victimized by the violence of terrorists, criminals, and special groups, today's challenges are becoming the provision of services and opportunities for all Iraqis that give hope. Iraqi and coalition forces continue in their

partnership and are committed to working with the Iraqi people to establish security and build the new Iraq. And with that, the general and I are happy to take your questions.

REP1: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Major General Askari, my question is in regards to the operations in Diyala, in particular the Kurdish forces in the northern side of the province. There was a statement by Brigadier General Naldam[ph] Al-Kirkuki[ph] who is the...their...who is the commander of the 43rd Brigade, and he said that they refused [the] order of the minister of defense in withdrawal from the areas. And they said that this brig-...these forces are linked to the...or they report to the Kurdish government and they shouldn't take orders from.... Also, General Perkins. Recently we've seen...witnessed spikes in violence in Baghdad. And what's the reasons behind the spikes in violence after the stability and security that we've seen?

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: First of all, those statements, they're all, you know, statements that was not announced by me or said by me. And I...they all...the commander of the Brigade 34, it's from Kurdistan, and it's from the

Peshmerga. And it was put there while the Iraqi forces, they weren't able to do things up there because they were busy doing other operations elsewhere. And the deal was that they come here and fill the gap, the security gap, and not to give the chance to the terrorist elements to affect the people or influence the people in those areas. And this brigade, I mean, amount...to keep them or withdraw them and send them back to Kurdistan, it's...I mean a matter.... Of course we have to admit that this brigade has done a lot of work and helped stability of security. And I don't think these statements are true statements, but they're all.... We visited the brigade and we talked with them. And we've prepared the 4th Brigade, 1st Division and they're working now in the area with the 34th Brigade, the Kurdish brigade. And they came from Kurdistan and they can return back with the decision of the government as well. And we told the government that there is no need for this brigade to be there anymore. And, with all due respect, they said that they are going to talk to their commanders in Kurdistan and they're going to withdraw in the upcoming two or three days. And we all work to protect the security of Iraq. And the issue of hav-...the existence of this brigade is not an issue. And this is something that belongs to the political officials to discuss.

BG PERKINS: With regards to the attacks that we've seen lately, I think it is

important to note what the attacks were focused on, the nature of the attacks, and probably most importantly, the results of the attacks. Clearly, it is evident that there are still terrorist elements out there. Al-Qaida, special group criminals that are intent on preventing progress throughout all of Iraq. And as these operations that we discussed here today continue to be more successful and pervasive throughout the country, these terrorist elements are feeling more and more pressure in their area that their freedom of movement is reduced. And therefore, they want to show that they are still relevant and still have an impact. And so this is sort of their attempt to show, in fact, that they have some capability left, albeit significantly less than a year ago. I think if you take a look at what they are focusing on, it is indicative of what challenges them the most. A couple of weeks ago, the pilgrims to Kadhimiya were attacked. So some...people who were trying to exercise their freedom of religion were attacked. They go after some Iraqi police stations. They go after senior leaders who are cooperating with all of Iraq to bring freedom and prosperity against[sic] the country. So they are starting to focus on those things that are clearly indicative of progress. And then other times, it literally is just innocent civilians, many times women and children, to just instill a sense of fear throughout the community. So they clearly are displaying their wanton disregard for innocent

civilians. They are targeting those key examples of progress in Iraq. What I would note though is the response from it. What they desire is to drive a wedge between people in Iraq so that they will turn against each other. Their desire is to prevent this progress. Their desire is to terrorize people so that they will not take part in this progress. But what you have seen in almost every case and, for existence[sic]...for example, the suicide bombers in Kadhimiya, the day after that, had this been a year ago, you would have seen probably retribution attacks, maybe an additional 50 people killed that those people thought were responsible for it. Well, instead of turning against each other, the Iraqis came together. And the day after they were attacked, there were zero attacks in Baghdad. So, instead of spiraling down into ethno-sectarian violence, the Iraqi people have universally rejected the terrorists, have rejected their bankrupt philosophy, and realize exactly what they're trying to do. So I think we have to be true to ourself-...we have to be honest with ourselves and understand [that] these things will still continue out there. Signs of progress will still continue to threaten the terrorists. And that as all Iraqis pull together with the coalition force, we will continue to press on. And the great example of the operations we just talked about now, that the rule of law will be the rule of the day and this activity will not stand.

REP2:

Gina Chon, Wall Street Journal. This question is for both of you. Could you compare the military operations in Diyala to what you had faced in Mosul? Because it seems like in Mosul they...there wasn't really that much of a fight and they had just sort of faded away. But in Diyala that there are...you know we are still seeing suicide bombings and other operations conducted by al-Qaida and the insurgents. There was the attempt yesterday on the governor. So, are you seeing them put up much more of a fight in Diyala? And then how is that affecting the operations there? Thank you.

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Of course, Diyala, to us and to the coalition forces, it's a very difficult theater to us. And especially, I mean the demographic and there's...the land in Diyala...the geography in Diyala had made it a good atmosphere and environment for the terrorist groups. There are mountains. There is a lot of orchards. And there are so many districts and neighborhoods and farms. And that made all the other, you know, operations that happened in other provinces that...though all the terrorist groups moved elements to...terrorist elements moved to this province. And this is the last stronghold or this safe haven for the terrorist groups. And operations in Diyala, especially in...the operation started and it's paused now. And when it starts again we

expect that all the...and we always put the worst in our expectations. I think it's going to be a fight of suicide bomber, vests, and a fight of IEDs and it started. And when I told you the story of this captain and what he has done. And we have to say that the EOD directorate in Ministry of Defen-...of Interior has helped us a lot as far as defusing those IEDs. And so the work is going to be concentrated or focused in Diyala. And maybe the work...the fight in Diyala and it's different than Mosul or Ninawa because the garments of the people in Diyala...the Diyala society is different than the Diyal-...the Mosul area. And I think that the situation is different in Mosul because there are more areas where those terrorist elements can conduct their attacks or perpetrate their attacks. But in Diyala it's different and...because we have a lot...we had about 5 people got killed from our side and a lot of people got injured. And this is...and so we did have a lot of sacrifices throughout the first and second phase of this operation. But I want to say that operations in Ninawa was...achieved all the goals and helped...and...to get rid of a lot of terrorist activities and terrorist groups up there. But we still need...there are some safe havens still in there in Ninawa and we need to focus on that. I think the command...the operation command is going to work but needs consolidation and strength...to be strength, too. Please, General.

BG PERKINS: I'd...to sort of amplify some of the things the general said. As a previous commander, I'll tell you, you know, every combat operation has its unique aspects to it. If you compare an urban terrain to the terrain we have in Diyala, one of the significant differences is just the amount of space that both the enemy has to operate in and, of course, the amount of space and terrain that you have to be able to surge forces in and cover. The terrain, as he said, is fairly difficult in areas. There's the palm groves, there's agricultural areas which provides a lot of cover and concealment. There are the mountainous areas. And so just from a space-time aspect, it's significantly different than if you have an urban area which presents its own set of challenges, but is somewhat easier to isolate. And therefore, as you continue to push through a very large area like Diyala, you have to continue to push through and then you have to hold that terrain. So not only do you have a lot of terrain that you have to operate through, but then it takes a significant amount of time and effort and forces to hold the terrain that you've already acquired so, again, that they cannot come back and occupy it. So that presents probably one of the largest challenges out there. Which is why we were just up there with the deputy prime minister on Saturday, coming up and working with, again, the governor and the officials there on the follow-on plan, which is how do we bring services? How do we bring a reconstruction plan behind the

military operation so that the terrain is held both from a physical point of view, as well as from a services point of view. And so it's this multipronged approach that we think will bring success, especially in a very large geographical area like Diyala.

REP3: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As far as those sleeping cells or...that we heard a lot of talks about sleeping cells in the Mosul area. And as we mentioned that there is no big fight and there was no big fight in Mosul. How can we resolve or talk...deal with this, these cells in Mosul? Terrorist cells. Also, we heard that there was a person or persons from the southern side of Iraq went to Kirkuk or are going to go...is going to go to Kirkuk. How...is that going to create any problems between these forces and the current forces that we have in Mosul right now in the northern side of Iraq? Thank you.

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: As far as dealing with those cells or terrorist cells, that is part of the terrorist groups, especially al-Qaida. First thing is the intel information that we can gather about them. Of course, activating the intel work is going to help a lot. And we have worked and gathered all information about them, their fake names, and their named

addresses and everything. So try to follow up and tracking on...continue the pressure...applying the pressure, military operations in each area that's not going to also give them the chance to be active. Also, your questions are...we're going to answer your questions briefly because you have...there's a lot of you here today and there are so many questions that needs to be answered. The minister of defense, he visited Kirkuk. We don't want to always talk about the sensitivity between the Army...the Iraqi Army in different sectors and different forces. Iraqi Army is a diversified army. [It] has different people – Kurds, Arabs. We have...we can't say this is a northern division and this is a southern division. That those are Shi'ite and the others are Sunnis. If we can...if we use a strategy or this mechanism, we're not going to be able to succeed. That's why assessment of the security situation of the recent event in Kirkuk, the minister of defense actually visited the area. And we have enough forces in Mosul, Basra, Wasit. The Iraqi Army actually has...contains all different sects and ethnicities. And so when the Army works as you see in each area, the...you won't have or create any problems because we deal with the Iraqi Army soldiers as Iraqis and not according to or based on ethnicity or.... And you are part of those people also. We are all Iraqis. Ladies first. Go ahead.

REP4:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Major General Mohammed. The checkpoints...joint checkpoints between the Iraqi Army and the MOI force is very important. The existence of the checkpoints, inside and outside Baghdad, I think that the joint work I think is very necessary and we have noticed that the Army can...having the Army or joint checkpoints is better when they have the Army and the police together.

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: We...our police are doing a great job. And we can't undermine their work. And they are similar to the Army. It's only the labels. There are police and there are Army. But I think the...of course the work...the joint work is very important and I think it's very necessary. And I think the Iraqi Army [and] the Iraqi police can work together in those checkpoints. And of course the Army...the police, of course, they have more...different experience than the Iraqi Army as far as forensics and all that.

REP4: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Of course, outside in the cities also when there are checkpoints and there are patrols also from the coalition side, I think it's very necessary, too.

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Of course I agree with you. When we have more checkpoints and patrols that gives a sense of safety and security to the people.

REP5:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Major General, we are talking about a plan in this province and in other province, but we never heard about plans to secure the borders that I see they are more important to us than providing security in our...security plans in provinces.

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Good for you. I think this is a very good question. And I think security is one and you can't divide it. When you study a security plan in a country like Iraq that has borders with six different countries...neighboring countries and the border's about...more than 3,500 kilometers and it varies. It has deserts, land, water borders. And then the borders are part of the security plan. They command all borders. They're working with the Ministry of Interior and there are a lot of efforts are exerted to this thing. And we are working on that. Of course, there are all...we have accounted and considered everything for...and there are so many elements. We put a lot of qualified officers, a lot of agencies and offices and departments that

wasn't before there. We put new forts as well on the borders. And this is the work that's coinciding with the operations that we're doing. When we're doing operation somewhere else, that doesn't mean we are not doing any work on the borders. And now we are opening new police stations on the borders. Also forts on the borders. They ask for a team from the Ministry of Defense...from the Air Force to import airplanes and for surveillance and for reconning purposes also. So this is a very vital and pivotal issue. And we're always trying to support these forces in order to provide security for the borders.

REP6: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: My question is to General Perkins. What is the role of the coalition forces in Basha'er al-Khair security operation in Diyala? And is it limited to the infantry or also we have air support as well?

BG PERKINS: Well, as you know, the operations [in] Diyala are Iraqi planned and Iraqi led. However, the coalition continues to support them across a broad range of capabilities. They are supporting them with air support, engineer support, artillery support, as well as the ability to conduct logistical operations – delivering some supplies and things such as that. I will say that the capacity and capability of the Iraqi forces has grown significantly and their ability, especially in the

logistical realm compared to even recent operations in Basra, Maysan Province, et cetera, like that. But we continue to partner with them side by side and provide a broad range of support and conduct these operations together.

REP7: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Major General....

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: We're both major generals. Which general are you talking to?

REP7: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: To you, General Askari. The [unintelligible] road, they used to have a lot of fake checkpoints and...on this road. And where you at as far as this...where are you at as far as this...controlling this road?

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: As you know, right now the operation stopped since the 11th of August. And these roads are all marked. And we...it's in a part of our plans. After the period...the amnesty period, we're going to resume with the third phase that's going to secure the administrative borders. All the borders, all the administrative borders in Diyala

Province is going to be, and we're not going to exclude anything. We discussed and we decided from the operation commander to open Ira-...to put checkpoints...joint checkpoints. And even these Awakening groups, they are not working individually, but they're working as part of this...these checkpoints...joint checkpoints. They're going to be with the Army, with the police, the Sons of Iraq with the things that they have contributed so far. They are not going to work individually. They're going to.... As far as putting checkpoints, they have to work together with the police and the Army or both together at the same time.

REP8: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Why we didn't...we did not return... or the dismantled army, the old army, the former Iraqi Army?

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: We have talked about this, like, since five years ago. We have to know that the...this fact: that the Iraqi...the current Iraqi Army is not the old...the former Iraqi Army. It's different. The old Iraqi Army was huge numbers, but no quality though. There's huge numbers, but no equipment, no training, and no...so it was.... But the current army that we have is a quality army. It has a limited number, but

it's good equipped, good trained, and they're volunteers. They're not mandatory. So we've talked to the, you know, Ministry of Defense. And we all hear...we all are former Iraqi Army officers. And we put a plan that the small ranks...we need the small ranks. The medium ranks, they're going to return back to the service. But according...but it's going to be based on the needs and how much we need them. Some of them maybe don't want to come back, they want to retire. So it's going to be based on the needs...the need to them. And they're going to receive all their rights and according or based on the mechanism that's been put by the Ministry of Defense. There is a plan in place. We are serious about this. And the prime minister [is] also serious about it. And he always is directing as far as the Iraq-...former Iraqi Army. Now, the new Iraqi Army is...the doors are open to all the volunteers, whoever that wants to volunteer. Now, weapons and equipment can be carried by the new, you know, the new work that's been done by the Iraqi Army. I don't think old Iraqi officers can do with or digest it. Iraqi Army is being trained by NATO. It's being trained by the coalition. So the principles of the true training, if you don't have the basics of the true...real training, you will not be able to be part of this army. Some of the Iraqi Army officers...former Iraqi Army officers can...when they come to the operation rooms, they don't know how to deal with computers, with the latest technology, with satellite

technology. They don't know about these...this modern technology that's been done by, you know, or added to the Iraqi Army by the coalition forces, Italian forces, the...you know, all the different coalition forces. But that doesn't mean we're going to leave or let go of those former Army soldiers. But whoever wants to, we put a mechanism in place where whoever that wants to come back and serve, we're going...we're welcoming them. The ones that doesn't want to do that, they can retire according to the retirement law or pension law.

REP9: [Repeats question in Arabic.]

INT: My question is to Brigadier General Perkins. About the stance of...the position of the Multi-National Force from the request that the Iraqi government to...when the Iraqi government requested that Peshmerga to withdraw from Diyala area, the...even yesterday, Mahmoot[ph] Angawi[ph], he announced that he's not going to withdraw his forces from those areas. In...according to the federal government, they're going to wait to the Kurdistan area to decide.

BG PERKINS: Clearly that's an Iraqi issue. It's an Iraqi command-and-control issue. Those forces are under the command of the Iraqi command. And I think, as the General said, they are working through that. And the prime minister is giving his guidance to the Iraqi forces. So we

see that as an Iraqi command-and-control issue.

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

Yes.

REP10:

[Unintelligible]. Can both of you maybe tell us just how many casualties the armies have taken since the beginning of the Diyala operation? And maybe, for the major general, it seems as if you're working from a list of wanted men. How many men remain at large? What are they charged with? And that's it. Thank you.

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

The list is available and the numbers [have] been put...or the figures. We don't want to.... But you have the right to know the charges against them. They are all terrorist activities – killing, displacement, terrorizing civilians, or attacking Iraqi security forces and Multi-National Force. So those targets that's been arrested so far, they are all according or based on arrests done or a process done according to arrest warrants. And they all...most of them, they confessed. And some of them, they actually provided documented videos that...on how they behead people and how they had women and kill people and attack Iraqi forces and security forces. So scenes that cannot be put on TV. And those people, they were there and

they were judging people, putting people on trial, and killing people and beheading them. And they came to us and they gave us the videos. And some things that I can't even talk to you about. Those crimes against humanity, against Iraqi civilians. So those targets are real targets. And we are working on arresting them. Most of them has confessed in front of the judge. And they...some of them came with us and they gave us information and told us about the places where they killed the Iraqi people and civilians. And we found their...the dead bodies as well. They came to us where they...and showed us the tools and the things and the places where they used to kill people. And I don't know about the other...the other part of your question was the casualties. When I said the...about the sacrifices, about the 5 people last week. Since the operation started, 5 people got killed and 35 got injured. That's as far as the Iraqi security forces. But as far as the Iraqi civilians, the Ministry of Health has given out the numbers for the casualties from the Iraqi civilians. I think 7 civilians got killed and more than 38 were injured. From the Iraqi security forces, we have this fight against the terrorist groups and we're trying to provide security to the people so....

BG PERKINS: A follow up, quickly. From the coalition point of view, there's actually a number of operations going on. So we don't just separate

that one casualty-wise because there are concurrent ones going on in tandem with that. But I will assure you that—especially compared to a lot of the recent operations—this one has probably had the largest amount of intelligence preparation done so there are intelligence-driven operations to clearly refine the targets that are driving the operations. And as we said, one of the good signs of progress and reconciliation is that this operation has generated a lot of local support. So a lot of the locals, once the Iraqi security forces come through...the coalition forces, are coming forth to cooperate, to provide additional intelligence. And now some are starting to take advantage of the amnesty that is being offered from the prime minister. So again, the intent is to work with everybody. And most importantly, the population in that area because they, probably more than anyone else, want a peaceful outcome of this and they want to take ownership of Diyala.

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Speaks briefly in Arabic without translation.]

REP11:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

General Perkins, through the two operations...previous operations in Diyala, the coalition forces decided to get security forces involved in Diyala and fight in Diyala. Major General Askari, Basha'er al-Khair Operation is not only for terrorist groups, but also for outlaws

and criminal groups. So you said 663 terrorist elements. Were they all from al-Qaida?

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Not all of them from al-Qaida. Some of them are outlaws. Some of them are gangs and organized groups. And some of them militias. But the majority of them, they were from al-Qaida networks. And I said 42, they were emirs. And they're leaders. And they confessed to that.

BG PERKINS:

Yeah, I think, again, to make it clear. The operation in Diyala was the prime minister's decision. This is Iraqi planned and Iraqi led and the coalition is there supporting them and partnering alongside them. But clearly this was the prime minister's decision to conduct operations in Diyala.

REP12:

Hello. Miguel Marquez with ABC News. I want you to know I'm slouching, not because I'm disrespectful or I have bad posture, but because the cameras can't see behind it.

MG AL-ASKARI:

No problem.

REP12:

A quick question for you, General. If you can, update us on the Sons of Iraq. How many do we have now? How many have been moved into the police force or the military. It's almost a year since this program has been going. Is...I don't know if pressure is the right word, but are there discussions? What is the desire of the U.S. for the Iraqi government to take over...take this over? And for you, General Mohammed, if I could, elections. This is a big issue with the U.S. It's a big benchmark. As someone who clearly wants to bring peace and stability to Iraq, how important is it that those...from the perspective of the MOD, how important is it that those elections be held? Thank you.

BG PERKINS:

To answer your questions with regards to Sons of Iraq, clearly the coalition and the Government of Iraq, and I think the Iraqi people realize that these are very brave, courageous people that stood up in a time of need of their country to protect and were a major reason that over this last year we've seen such a dramatic downturn in security incidences. So, I know from the coalition point of view and from the Government of Iraq, there's two major things that we are focusing on as we work through this transition. One, that the security levels are maintained so there's an aspect of determining how many have to remain in a security role, versus how many can be transitioned. And the second principle that we're focusing on is

that our commitment to them will be kept. They partnered with us and, therefore, we, along with the Iraqi government, are going to make sure that we keep faith with them. There are about 101,000 or so Sons of Iraq out there. And so we are in extensive discussions with the Government of Iraq along with all the Sons of Iraq themselves, their leaders and the coalition force to decide, first of all, what is the requirement from a security point of view? It differs province from province. Just like just about every situation in Iraq is very different up in Mosul than it is in Baghdad than it is in Basra, so is the requirement for Sons of Iraq or any security force. So we're taking a look at that first. Those that...and when you take a look at security, a large number of them will go into Iraqi police. Some will go into the Iraqi Army. The intent from all sides concerned is that all of the Sons of Iraq will be transferred out from coalition control and they will be assimilated into Iraqi society or into the Iraqi security forces. So a number will go in the Iraqi security forces. Those that do not end up in the security forces, we, again, are working with the Government of Iraq through a number of programs to provide training and vocational skills, literacy programs, apprenticeship programs that they then can either move into the civilian job market or they can move into a ministry with a number of job openings there. We are partnering with civilian companies that are looking to invest in Iraq and partner with them

not only for jobs, but partner with them for training programs so we can transition a Son of Iraq into possibly a training program and then into a job program. And quite honestly, as we're working through these, we're not looking for these programs to be only for Sons of Iraq. I mean the Government of Iraq is looking for these programs for all of its citizens, of course, of which this would be one part of the population. So there are many avenues that we are working through a fairly complex series of options. But I think it's clear to say the two things we are focusing on is to maintain the security situation and to make sure that we don't break faith with them.

REP12: Is there a date to, like, a time horizon by which the U.S. wants to assimilate all [unintelligible]?

BG PERKINS: We are working through that now. And again, there are, like I said, we're working with companies to stand up operations and things like that. So it's really not set on a date. It's based on conditions and the ability to put these into a viable program.

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Let me answer your question. General Perkins talked about the

figure he gave about 10,000 in Diyala works in Awakening groups. As far as the...your question as far...the elections...about the elections, there are two things. First, we wish that this elections can be held and done because we provided security procedures and people has the right to vote and participate in the elections. And the atmosphere now is different to the atmosphere before, and now our capabilities are improving and we are capable of providing security and securing those election sites. And also, as far as reconciliation...and national reconciliation and trying to bring all the Iraqi...different ethnicities together, I think it's...I think this is going to be a very broad, general sort of like elections and they're all going...all different ethnicities and parties are going to participate in this election. As you know that a lot of people didn't or boycotted elections before and they didn't want to participate. But now I think we are going to...the participation now I think is going to be public participation and it's going to serve Iraq in general.

REP13: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Ahmed Jassem.

INT: Major General Mohammed al-Askari, you talked about the successes and the victories that we...that you have achieved in Basha'er al-Khair. And I hope this is good for all Iraqis. And you didn't talk about the Mujahedin-e Khalq organization and that works in the same area that operations now are in right now. My

other question to General Perkins. In fact, before the air raids over targets...on targets that weren't accurate and a lot of casualties...and that caused a lot of casualties until you reached to the accuracy that you have right now.

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

As far as your question as far as Mujahedin-e Khalq, it's been here for years now. Not now. The Multi-National Force is providing security for that camp. The minister of defense has announced and stated that there are opera-...discussions and negotiations with the Multi-National Force through the operations. This organization, it's there in that camp and they don't have the authority to do any activities. And this is up to the Iraqi government. And we work according to the instructions that we get from the government.

BG PERKINS:

Again, I will tell you that we go to great extent when operations are conducted to minimize any collateral damage or unnecessary damage in the battlefield. There's probably never been a force fielded in the history of warfare that has gone to the extent to develop very precise weapons, expended the resources, time and energy to train and procure very accurate weapons. And so it is probably our number one...one of our number one priorities to make

sure we have very precise operations and that they affect only the targets designated. And we will continue to do that and, again, mitigate any issues that come about as we conduct those operations. And it also is a party of the Iraqi security forces that we partner with. And again, spend a lot of time and energy preparing to make sure that, in fact, any unnecessary collateral damage is mitigated and minimized.

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Speaks briefly in Arabic without translation.]

REP14:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

My first question is to General Mohammed. Don't you see that the...stopping the first phase of Diyala, that's going to create a good atmosphere to...for the terrorist groups to reorganize themselves? And my other question to the...General Perkins. There...I ask about the reason why the American forces are providing security or protecting Mujahedin-e Khalq organization. Especially that the American forces is saying that they support the Iraqi government and the Iraqi government has announced so many times that this organization is a terrorist organization and they're not willing to keep them in Iraq. So don't you see there is some sort of inconsistency between what the Iraqi...what the Multi-National Forces are doing and what the Iraqi government is doing?

**MG AL-
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

I just want to say something. We don't want to talk about details. The question is very clear. Time is limited here. As far as the decision of the prime minister to stop or halt the operations, that doesn't mean that the Iraqi security forces or the forces are going to withdraw and leave the battlefield open to the terrorist groups. This is a very humanitarian decision. It is to give the time and the chance to the terrorist elements to come back in and surrender. Yesterday—you know your question is very good question—some of those terrorist groups tried to kill or attack some of the Iraqi security forces yesterday and they were faced by the Iraqi forces and they killed them; they got killed and arrested. So this...the re...the decision behind stopping the operations is to give the chance to the terrorist elements to come back to us and to surrender themselves. But that doesn't mean we're not going to kill them if they try to attack us.

BG PERKINS:

With regards to the MEK, we are working very closely with the Government of Iraq as we go through this process to come up with a resolution. The role of the coalition forces as well as the Iraqi security forces is very transparent between the two of us. And there,

again, in our discussions with the Government of Iraq, we are moving forward together and we will come up with a resolution to this that both sides think is the best way to deal with the situation. But, of course, it is a transparent process and it is something that continues to move forward in a positive manner.

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Last question.

REP15:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Major General Al-Askari, you mentioned in... When you were talking about the operation, you talked about a village that was full of IEDs. And when did that happen? Can you give us any info?

MG AL-ASKARI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

This village actually lies [on] the southern side of Kanan area. And the terrorist groups, they withdrew from there—I'm sorry. First of all, the terrorist groups, they displaced all the people...residents of this village. And they took over...occupied the village. And when they heard that the coalition or that the operations are going to reach to this area, they decided to leave the area and put IEDs. But with cooperation with the Iraqi people, they provided all the information

to us. And they warned the Iraqi security forces. And when the MOD and MOI personnel came over there and they saw that it's full of mines and IEDs.

REP16: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: My question is to General Mohammed. What was the re-...? General Perkins. What was the reason behind the withdrawal of the Georgian forces outside of Iraq? And did that affect any...the coalition forces because they left their places in Iraq?

BG PERKINS: The Georgian forces were recalled back on the behest of their national government to deal with the situation in Georgia. We had a previously discussed agreement with them that, even before they deployed, that the United States would assist in their redeployment for whatever reason – humanitarian requirements or whatever their national government required of them. We have...we were actually in the process of reallocating resources and moving forces around the battlefield so we just developed a mitigation plan to move other units in to take over the areas they were responsible for. They obviously were a major contributor. We value their work here. They were a great partner in the coalition. But we have mitigated their movement out and have subsequently assigned their duties to other forces.

REP17: Will they be coming back, General?

BG PERKINS: They are still dealing with the situation up there in Georgia. So right now, we have come up with a solution to deal with the areas that they had been responsible for.

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Last question.

REP18: Major General Al-Askari, in regards to the amnesty the prime minister has directed and issued to the...those militiamen that are going to surrender themselves. Do you think or do you expect that you are going to receive a big or numbers...a lot of people are going to turn in themselves? And do you think that we are going to see outcome of these things? And what are the legal aspects of that?

MG AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: First, this decision is going to help, you know, a lot of terrorist elements to come back and surrender themselves. So far we have about 11 of them. I think the last hours are going to be decisive. And I think of this...and...there is a committee that has been formed.

There are rules and regulations and ways or procedures how to deal with them. I think from the legal side of this, the...whoever that's going to surrender themselves, they're going to have amnesty from the government. The government...if they commit any crimes against the government, the government is going to...not to punish them for that. But if they committed crimes against any civilians, other civilians because this is a civilian or this is a personal right, and if the family wants to complain about them, they will be punished for that. But if they committed anything against the government, there will be...they'll have amnesty. Thank you very much.